



# CRS Parent Connection

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services



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## ADRS Montgomery offices have relocated

The Montgomery location of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) has moved to three newly renovated buildings near downtown Montgomery.

The new complex, located on South Lawrence Street only two blocks from Interstate 85, brings all of the department's administrative offices and its program offices to one convenient location.

Previously, staff from the department's four major programs – Alabama's Early Intervention System (EI), Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS), Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS), and the State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) – were split among several locations.

ADRS Commissioner Steve Shivers said having all ADRS programs located in one facility is more convenient for the department's consumers, Alabamians with disabilities from birth to old age.

"Having our 'continuum of services' housed under one roof is not only more efficient for delivering services," said Shivers, "it also makes the experience easier for those who need our services."

CRS has gained a more spacious, state-of-the-art clinic to serve children with disabilities and their families.

The new CRS location is 560 S. Lawrence St. The telephone number of the switchboard is 334-293-7500.



***Left,** Gov. Bob Riley holds EI and CRS consumer Mae Maloch while he and ADRS Commissioner Steve Shivers assist CRS consumer Dameyune Smith with cutting the ribbon in front of the new ADRS building in Montgomery, **Below,** One of the new ADRS buildings houses the Montgomery CRS clinic and staff.*



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Parent Connection is a complimentary newsletter published by Children's Rehabilitation Service for families of children with special health care needs. The goal of this newsletter is to increase communication and share information about children with special health care needs and their families. The newsletter reflects a family-centered theme throughout and serves as a forum for family members to share information, thoughts, feelings, concerns, etc. Nothing printed or implied in this publication constitutes an endorsement by the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.

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# A Special Message from the Commissioner

Hello, Parents and Caregivers,

For the past nine years, I have had the honor, privilege and great pleasure to serve as the commissioner of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services. My entire career has been in rehabilitation, but these years have been the most rewarding time of my life.

From my unique vantage point, I have witnessed the tireless hard work of our staff, seen the dedication staff has for our mission to serve children and adults with disabilities, and shared in the successes that have been brought about on behalf of the consumers and families we serve. The personal relationships I have seen develop over the years among our staff and CRS families have been a symbol of our mission and the foundation for any success we celebrate together.



With all of that in mind, I am announcing that I will be retiring as your commissioner effective Dec. 31, 2008. While I enjoy looking back at the department's accomplishments, and they are many, I am now looking forward to devoting myself to my family, whom have been most understanding and supportive during these past years.

Words cannot express how gratifying and fulfilling it has been to work with a staff that is so dedicated personally to the families and children who are part of CRS. There is a unique bond that elevates that relationship from service providers to members of your extended families. It is relationships that last a lifetime.

Please accept my personal thanks for allowing me and the CRS staff to be apart of your lives. I cannot express how you and your children have enriched my own life. I will be forever grateful.

I wish all of you continued success for your children and your family.

**Steve Shivers**  
*Commissioner*

**"Director's Chair"  
returns next issue**



# Disabilities network conference focuses on inclusion

Hundreds of parents, self-advocates, and professionals came out to the Bryant Conference Center in Tuscaloosa for two days of training and encouragement on the inclusion of people with disabilities in society.

The theme of the Developmental Disabilities Network Conference was “United We Stand.”

It was sponsored by the Alabama Council for Developmental Disabilities (ACDD), Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP), University of Alabama at Birmingham Civitan International Research Center, and Alabama’s University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD).

This conference included many wonderful speakers from around the country, such as Al Condeluci, chief executive officer of United Cerebral Palsy of Pittsburgh, who addressed “Cultural Shift.” He asked the question, “What do people want?” Then he answered, “Jobs, housing, transportation, friends. People with disabilities want the same things. As a nation how have we done in making this happen?”

- 75 percent of people with disabilities are unemployed, underemployed or idle,
- 7 percent own their own home (as compared with 71 percent of typical adults),
- Most communities have no or very limited public transportation options,
- Average social capital for people with disabilities is about 30 (150 is typical).

Condeluci quoted Mahatma Gandhi when he said, “We must become the change we wish to create.”



*Dan Habib's documentary film 'Including Samuel' examines the educational and social inclusion of youth with disabilities as a civil rights issue.*

Also speaking was Chris Moore, work instructor for the Shelby County School system. Moore’s overview of trials and tribulations made people laugh aloud, shed a few tears and clap exuberantly at the success of a program that helped student with disabilities to transition into meaningful jobs.

Most impressive and moving was a very special DVD presentation called “Including Samuel,” a documentary by Dan Habib, filmmaker and photojournalist.

This is a must-see video for everyone. It is a real eye-opener as to why everyone needs to be included. It also points out that inclusion has different meanings for different people.

Inclusion must be on an individual basis so that every child and every person can receive what he or she needs to be happy, productive and successful in society.

This is not your average documentary. It is not the typical tearjerker, or snoozer as some documentaries can be. This documentary is downright enjoyable for all ages and leaves people feeling like they have been somewhere very special. To learn more about this film,

you may visit their website at [www.includingsamuel.com](http://www.includingsamuel.com).

Another excellent speaker was Jayne Chase, an independent consultant. She was quite the comedian and really brought the point home on inclusion by asking a series of questions: “What if there were no separate school buses?” “What if every child rode the same bus?” “What if there were no Miracle and Challenger leagues?” “What if everyone just played baseball?”

She is also the director of Partners in Policy Making, better known as “Partners with a Twist.” We recommend any parent, grandparent, or professional join Partners with a Twist, sponsored through the Alabama Council for Developmental Disabilities. This would not only give you an opportunity to meet Chase, but would open your world to the real knowledge and experiences of the special needs community.

**Sharon Henderson**  
**Monica Jackson**  
*Parent Consultants*



*Commissioner Steve Shivers presents Rep. Greg Wren with the ARA award*

## Rep. Greg Wren wins ARA Award

Commissioner Steve Shivers recently presented Alabama Rep. Greg Wren, R-Montgomery, with the “Governmental Affairs Award.”

Wren was honored with the distinguished Alabama Rehabilitation Association (ARA) award at its annual meeting in September.

He led the way to prevent a budget cut for the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services in fiscal year 2009. This resulted in a revised budget that included an additional \$2 million for Alabama’s Early Intervention System (EI) and a “conditional appropriation” of \$3.4 million to bring ADRS funding up to fiscal year 2008 levels. In a year when proration is still considered a possibility, the accomplishment was nothing short of remarkable.



# UAB celebrates Neurofibromatosis Awareness Day

Families and consumers came out to support the Neurofibromatosis (NF) Awareness Day at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Genetics Clinic on Oct. 4, located in the Kaul Human Genetics Building in Birmingham.

UAB Genetics department is the national "center stage" for research. There are nine constituents around the country with UAB Genetics being the forerunner.

Dr. Bruce Korf and his team are relentless in their efforts to help educate, find treatments, funding and, ultimately, a cure for NF.

According to the Children's Tumor Foundation, "NF is more prevalent than cystic fibrosis, Duchenne muscular dystrophy, and Huntington's disease combined. Although over 100,000 Americans have NF and one in every 3,000 babies is born with the disorder, it still is relatively unknown to the public. NF affects people of all races, ethnic origins, and both sexes. NF causes tumors to grow on nerves throughout the body and can affect development of the brain, cardiovascular



*The UAB Genetics department is the forerunner in NF research. From left to right: Vicki Garmon, CGC; Alyssa Reddy, MD; Christina Barger, MS; S. Lane Rutledge, MD; Amy Theos, MD; and Bruce Korf, MD.*

system, bones and skin. This disorder can lead to the loss of sight or hearing; skeletal defects, such as abnormal curvature of the spine (scoliosis) or bowing of the leg; learning disabilities; disfigurement; chronic pain; cardiovascular problems, including high blood pressure; cancer; and a wide variety of other complications."

There are 3 types of NF: neurofibromatosis type 1 (most common), neurofibromatosis type 2 (less common), and schwannomatosis (rare).

For more information on Neurofibromatosis, please visit the Children's Tumor Foundation at [www.ctf.org](http://www.ctf.org) or by calling (205) 934-5567 or toll free 1-866-822-4362.

## ClemsonLife provides higher education experience for students who have intellectual disabilities

Clemson University's Eugene T. Moore School of Education will launch ClemsonLIFE in January 2009, a program designed to provide a college experience for students with intellectual disabilities.

The College Transition Connection (CTC) is funding the development of this innovative model program, with financial support from the state of South Carolina. The CTC grant will total \$155,000 over three years. The National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) is providing technical assistance and grant administration.

State Superintendent of Education Jim Rex joined Clemson faculty, state legislators, CTC board members, NDSS representatives, and prospective students with disabilities and their parents when the program was announced recently at an event on the Clemson campus.

ClemsonLIFE (Learning Is For Everyone)

is designed to provide a coordinated course of study that enables qualified students to experience college life while developing the employment and independent living skills necessary to participate fully in society.

"Clemson University's willingness to lead and innovate, the College Transition Connection's leadership, and the state of South Carolina's financial support will achieve 21st century outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities in South Carolina and a model for the rest of the country to follow," said Stephanie Smith Lee, NDSS senior policy advisor.

The two-year program will provide academic instruction, including financial literacy, decision-making, business communication, and independent living skills, while also providing job internships and opportunities to be included in campus

life, all focused around providing a successful transition to the work environment.

The pilot cohort of three students will be admitted in January, with six more students accepted each fall and thereafter. The students will learn independent living skills while taking part in various off-campus and on-campus activities. Program goals include academic enrichment, socialization, independent living skills and job training and career exploration.

ClemsonLIFE is supported by a partnership between CTC, NDSS, and the Center for Disability Resources at the University of South Carolina.

For more information, visit: <http://www.clemson.edu/culife>.

*Article printed with permission from Clemson University.*

# Families prepare for emergencies

September was National Preparedness Month and the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services staff was busy around the state conducting trainings for consumers and consumer groups on the importance of being prepared for an emergency.

The department has had the opportunity to offer numerous trainings to consumers over the past several months thanks to a grant received through the National Organization on Disability that was funded by the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund.

Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS) consumers in Montgomery and Mobile were able to participate in the training and put together a "go bag."

The "go bag" contained water, a 12-hour light stick, a solar blanket, a 1,200-calorie food bar, three antiseptic towelettes and a whistle.

The "go bag" has been very successful in helping individuals with disabilities take the first step in preparing for an emergency. Many of the participants at these events have talked about how they intend to go back to their homes and add other items to their "go bag," which is exactly what staff hoped to accomplish.



*Members of Montgomery's Parent Advisory Committee fill their 'go' bags with emergency preparedness materials.*

Staff from the CRS program also participated in the governor's fifth annual "Be Ready Day" held in Mobile at the end of September. This event was hosted by the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, the Alabama Department of Homeland Security and the Mobile County Emergency Management Agency. Be Ready Day provided each agency who participated an opportunity to interact with attendees and exhibit emergency preparedness

materials. Gov. Bob Riley was in attendance and stressed the importance of preparing for any type of disaster or emergency.

**Tina Howell**  
*Emergency Preparedness grant coordinator*

# Week brings awareness to childhood lead poisoning

The Alabama Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program is committed to eliminating the risk of childhood lead poisoning in the state of Alabama. Lead remains an important public health problem despite its elimination from gasoline and house paint.

Lead is a toxic substance that poses a variety of dangers for humans. Young children and a developing fetus particularly are at risk. Lead poisoning can damage the central and peripheral nervous systems, the kidneys and the body's ability to regulate vitamin D, which is essential for promoting calcium absorption. The primary sources of lead exposure among U.S. children are lead-based paint and lead-contaminated dust and soil found in and around old, deteriorating buildings.

Today, childhood lead poisoning is considered to be the most preventable environmental disease of young children, yet an estimated 310,000 U.S. children have elevated blood lead levels. A simple blood test can prevent a lifetime flawed by the irreversible damage caused by lead poisoning.

While the national goal of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is to eliminate childhood lead poisoning in the United States by 2010, the goals of the Alabama Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Week are to effectively address childhood lead poisoning. These will include:

- raising awareness about this serious health issue;
- emphasizing the importance of screening

the highest risk children younger than 6 years of age, preferably screening them by 1 to 2 years of age;

- highlighting existing childhood lead poisoning prevention partnering efforts and increasing the establishment of new efforts;
- urging people to take steps to reduce their possible exposure to lead.

For more information on lead poisoning, call the Alabama Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, 1-800-654-1385.

**Jacqueline D. Harris, RN, BSN**  
*Alabama Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program*  
334-206-2966 – phone  
334-206-2950 – fax



## Family leadership in action

Family Voices is a national nonprofit organization that aims to achieve family-centered care for all children and youth with special health care needs and disabilities. Through our national network of family leaders, we provide families tools to make informed decisions, advocate for improved public and private policies, build partnerships among professionals and families, and serve as a trusted resource on health care. Family leadership is the essence of Family Voices. Family Voices was built – and continues to grow – by the determined efforts of a remarkable community of family and youth leaders and friends. Family-to-family communication of knowledge, resources, and support is fundamental to our work.

### Aleja-Laura Larson

As the parent of a child with special health care needs, it has become my passion to become an advocate for our daughter, Gracie, and for other children with special health care needs. The beauty of leadership is it can take so many forms and it challenges each and every one of us to use our talents and share them with others!

Our journey began June of 2005 with the birth of Gracie, our second daughter. Woven within Gracie was an extra chromosome. The diagnosis was Down syndrome. Gracie has been blessed with truly extraordinary traits including unconditional love, strength, innocence, the simplicity of childhood, and the ability to smile with her whole body! It is those extras within Gracie's little body that have fueled my passion for leadership and advocacy which will allow Gracie and other

children to have the life and opportunities they are entitled to. With leadership, awareness is born, and through awareness, our society will become more tolerant of those less able than ourselves.

I challenge parents to become leaders and take advantage of any leadership opportunities that may come their way. Start small, and think BIG! My journey began with becoming active in our local Down syndrome support group, which led to family networking, which led to strong physician relations, which led to education via the Internet and establishing a blog for Gracie, which led to becoming the chair of our state ICC Committee. Parent leadership not only heals the soul, it also creates a network of advocacy, and lifelong friendships.

The opportunities of leadership are endless and together as one big family alliance we can pave a brighter future for our children. Challenge yourself and challenge the parents around you! It does the heart good!

### Missi Baranko

My name is Missi Baranko, and I am the proud mom of four daughters. Our oldest daughter, Tashina, was born with a brain disorder called schizencephaly. At the time of her diagnosis, I was a stay-at-home mom who had little experience with disabilities. Luckily, I was blessed to have her involved with our Early Intervention program at an early age. Early Intervention helped to teach me that my husband and I know what is best for our daughter. We had to make a lot of tough decisions in those early years, which is probably where I learned a lot about the most important type of leadership: leading for

my child.

When Tashina was about 3 years old, one of the staff members at the Early Intervention program asked me if I would be interested in being on our Regional Interagency Coordinating Council (RICC). I didn't really know what it was or what it meant, but in the past I had participated on other committees for other things and had enjoyed it, so I agreed to be on this one.

I went to the first meeting and was intrigued by this group of professionals who were working on improving Early Intervention services in our region. This was obviously something I was very interested in since early intervention had been such an asset for us. I was especially interested in making sure that the public knew about the program so more families could access it.

Within a year or so, I was asked to be the coordinator for the RICC. I was quite nervous about coordinating it because I didn't feel that I really understood the lingo yet, but I agreed and am still doing it today. I remember thinking, "fake it until you make it," as I sat at meetings trying to figure things out. Eventually I picked things up and was given more opportunities to increase my leadership skills. I was often asked to co-present with Early Intervention staff about the benefits of Early Intervention. I also had opportunities to go to conferences related to Early Intervention. One of those conferences happened to be the Office of Special Education Programs conference (OSEP). Again, I wasn't really sure what it meant, but it was in Washington, D.C., so that sounded exciting.

*(Continued on Page 9)*

**For information about Family Voices, please contact the Alabama state coordinators, Susan Colburn (334) 293-7041, [susan.colburn@rehab.alabama.gov](mailto:susan.colburn@rehab.alabama.gov) or Jerry Oveson (251) 438-1609, [oveson@bellsouth.net](mailto:oveson@bellsouth.net).**



# Health website simple to use

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has released a more user-friendly version of [healthfinder.gov](http://healthfinder.gov). It is [www.helpfinder.gov](http://www.helpfinder.gov). The site offers quick and easy information and tools to help people stay healthy and prevent disease.

Coordinated by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP) and its National Health Information Center, the redesign of [healthfinder.gov](http://healthfinder.gov) was informed by health literacy and usability principles and tested with more than 650 users. It's easy to understand and navigate, especially for people who have limited health literacy.

Be sure to visit [healthfinder.gov](http://healthfinder.gov)'s Quick Guide to Healthy Living, [www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/](http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/), a new resource that uses everyday language and examples to:

- Tell users how to take action to improve their health using a "small-steps" approach
- Give users positive reasons to change their behavior
- Provide tools and encouragement, such as personal health calculators, menu planners and recipes, tips for caregivers, and printable lists of questions to take to the doctor

You also may try out the new "myhealthfinder" tool, [www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/](http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/), which provides personalized health recommendations based on sex, age, and pregnancy status. This feature offers evidence-based recommendations from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, an independent panel of experts in prevention and primary care sponsored by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Visit the new [healthfinder.gov](http://healthfinder.gov) today and spread the word about this exciting new resource. For instructions on how to link to [healthfinder.gov](http://healthfinder.gov), please visit [www.healthfinder.gov/aboutus/linking.aspx](http://www.healthfinder.gov/aboutus/linking.aspx).

## Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

c/o [healthfinder.gov](http://healthfinder.gov)/National Health Information Center  
P.O. Box 1133  
Washington, DC 20013-1133



## Clean Wheelchairs

*Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS) offices all around the state held wheelchair washes for the beginning of the school year. Above, Lydia Casady (in wheelchair) makes some new friends at the Mobile CRS office Wheelchair Wipeout. Top right, three girls enjoy face paintings at the Homewood CRS Wheelchair Wash.*

*Bottom right, volunteers wash a wheelchair in the Tuscaloosa CRS office. Bottom, Members of Boys Scout Troop #29 pose after cleaning wheelchairs at the Opelika CRS office.*







## Gold Medalist

*Joel Wilmoth (wearing number 3), plays a practice game of wheelchair rugby at the Lakeshore Foundation gym. The Children's Rehabilitation Service consumer recently won a gold medal at the Paralympics in Beijing, China. Joel, 19, is the youngest player ever selected to play on the team. He is a quad amputee and has been receiving services from the Homewood CRS office since he was 7 years old.*

## Funderful Times

What a wonderful time of year this is – from celebrating fall with all the orange and burnt tangerine of the leaves to visiting the county fair and tasting cotton candy on a stick or caramelized apples. Afterwards, the festivities of Thanksgiving and Christmas are flowing through the air so much that when you stick out your tongue, you taste it. Oh, the joys of the season.

However, this time of year, from now to spring, brings the humdrum of winter blahs. So what can we do with this indoor time? Play video games or use the television to babysit not only our children, but our minds? I don't think that is a good idea. As I pondered what I would like to accomplish this winter, I read the headlines in our local newspaper, "Volunteering reaches a low; volunteers needed."

Volunteering comes in many forms. Your local volunteer center has a huge list of activities that need to be done for individuals who are unable to do simple tasks, such as helping an elderly person by raking leaves, sweeping the porch, trimming or pruning bushes, cleaning flower beds or gardens. Look in your own backyard: Which of your neighbors could use a helping hand?

Sunday night we watch a television program where a group of volunteers restore or build

homes for those unable to provide this for their family. I thought, "I know someone who could use this help." But why not organize this as a neighborhood, church group or as a family to build a porch or ramp for someone who could use the assistance. Don't wait on a television program to come to town; simply organize it yourself.

Getting started is very simple. The first thing you need to do is look around you at what is needed. Talk with a family member or spouse; decide this holiday season or in honor of someone's birthday, that you will do this as your gift. After consulting with the individual regarding the project and getting his or her approval, check with local stores for the contribution of any items that are needed. Salvage lumber is something construction sites often take to the dump. Why not use these items to build a ramp?

Volunteering doesn't have to be a building project. What about providing a party for one of the Children's Rehabilitation Service clinics? When I go to a doctor's appointment at my local CRS office, I take coloring pages, a fresh box of crayons and magazines I no longer read. My husband got Santa Claus to stop by for a clinic last Christmas. Imagine what fun that was. A mother and her daughter provided a morning

of scrapbooking using supplies donated from her friends. To earn a merit badge, a young man read stories to the children waiting for their appointment. Once, I took my photo printer, took digital photos of the children and we made Mother's and Father's Day cards for the children to take home. The parents got in on it by helping take photos and making the cards.

At this point in my life, I am limited in getting away from my home. Not only do I provide care for our three sons with disabilities, but this summer I also became full-time caregiver to my elderly father who has a number of health issues. However, I don't let this stop me from volunteering. I write articles, such as this one, and manage two Yahoo groups that provide support for families who deal with people with disabilities.

Imagination is the key to volunteering, but seeing the need is a gift. Everywhere we look there are needs to be met. Working together we can make this an amazing world of being focused on others and offering a helping hand. Oh, my, what a valuable lesson we leave for our children: the gift of living by example.

**Rita Cobbs**  
*Parent, Huntsville*





## Book Review:

### *“All Kinds of Friends, Even Green!”*

“All Kinds of Friends, Even Green” is written and photographed by Ellen B. Senisi. It is a story told by a young boy named Moses, who happens to use a wheelchair. He takes the reader through the activities of an average day, until his teacher gives the class an assignment.

Each student is asked to write about a friend. Moses spends time considering which of his many friends he should write about. He thinks about his family, his teachers, his classmates, and his neighbors, until finally he thinks “animals can be friends, too.”

Moses writes a story about his neighbor’s pet iguana, Zaki. Zaki is an iguana with special needs because she doesn’t have any toes on her back feet. Moses says that one of his favorite things about Zaki is that she figures out how to get where she wants to be in different ways than other iguanas, just like he does in his wheelchair!

“All Kinds of Friends, Even Green” is an engaging children’s book, illustrated with photographs of Moses and his friends. It would be an excellent book to take to share with a class of young children learning about disabilities.

Check out this book and others written just for children in the Resource Center at the Children’s Rehabilitation Service office nearest you.

**Susan Colburn**  
CRS state parent consultant

## YLF deadline set

The deadline for high school students with disabilities to participate in the Alabama Governor’s Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) is March 13, 2009.

YLF is an intensive five-day career leadership training program held on the Troy University campus in June each year for high school juniors and seniors with disabilities. Next summer’s program will be held June 7-11.

Participants come from throughout the state to participate. Program activities focus on career planning, leadership development, technology resources and information on disability history to assist young people with disabilities in reaching their maximum potential. There is no charge to participate in the program.

For more information, visit: [www.rehab.alabama.gov/ylf](http://www.rehab.alabama.gov/ylf) or contact Becky Fields at 251-479-8611 or [becky.fields@rehab.alabama.gov](mailto:becky.fields@rehab.alabama.gov). You can also check with your local CRS office to pick up an application.

*(Family Leadership, continued from Page 6)*

When I look back, I realize going to the OSEP conference was really my largest stepping stone for leadership. I had the opportunity to meet other parents there who were in similar situations, and some were also coordinators of their RICCs. I also found out about a program in our state, called the Experienced Parent Program. This was a program that our region could access. It would allow a parent to be paid to work in the Early Intervention system. This parent would provide other parents with emotional support and assist families in finding resources and information. When I got back home, I eagerly dug in to find out what we needed to do to get that program in our region. After about seven months we had it up and running, and I was lucky enough to be the parent to do the job.

Working in the Experienced Parent Program in our region has continued to provide me with opportunities both career related and personally. I have been able to attend multiple parent leadership conferences as well as other conferences related to children and youth with special health care needs (CYSHCN). I have met many other parents and families in my state and



*Participants celebrate at the 2008 YLF graduation ceremony at Troy University.*

across the nation who have contributed to my leadership both locally and statewide. I have had the opportunity to present at a handful of conferences on what it is like to raise a child with special health care needs. This has helped to give me the confidence to continue presenting on a wide array of issues.

About a year ago, I was also asked to be a family consultant for Family Voices of North Dakota. This position allowed me to continue working on bettering the lives for families raising CYSHCN. Recently Family Voices of North Dakota held a Family Leadership Institute. I was able to be part of the planning committee and was a presenter at the Institute. It is amazing to see how the circle is now complete, and I am now a leader for those families who are just beginning to learn about parent leadership. I hope to continue my journey to becoming a better leader as it is something that gives so much back to those who do it!

**Rachel Rodriguez**  
**Aleja-Laura Larson**  
**Missi Baranko**  
Family Voices



## Let's YAC About It

### A park for me

A park was recently opened in Madison for people with disabilities and without disabilities to be able to play together.

It all started when I went to my sister Jacquelyne's birthday party at Kids Kingdom in Madison and couldn't play on the equipment in the playground.

I decided that it was time I did something about it. So, I went to the Madison City Council and asked them to help me make my dream come true so that I could play with my sister at a playground.

They provided \$150,000 to build the park. I thought about how I could make it accessible for all people. I wanted something that made everyone feel like they could play together.

I couldn't have done it without the help of Mayor Sandy Kirkendall and County Commissioner Dale Strong, who put all of their hard work into doing what had to be done. They worked so hard to make sure it was exactly what I wanted. If it was not what I wanted, they made sure to fix it so I was happy with it.

I am happy now that I have a place to play with non-disabled people. It makes me feel good that people with disabilities have a place to play. Growing up, I never went to playgrounds much because there were no accessible ones.

If I went, my parents had to carry me. I didn't think they should have to do that anymore. When my sister was born, they didn't take her to playgrounds unless I wasn't around. They didn't want me to feel left out.

Now I am trying to raise money to make the park bigger by doing a Commutative Brick sale. For more information or if you would like to purchase a brick, you can contact me at (256) 217-1596.

**Kayla Beard**  
YAC Member



### Where are they now? *Brinkley Fuller*

Brinkley Fuller is living in Birmingham and is currently working at AT&T living the American dream and, most definitely, enjoying it. Since YLF in 2003, a lot of great things have happened. I was selected as a delegate of Student Alabama Education Association (SAEA) and because of this selection, I was given the opportunity to participate in the National Education Association (NEA) convention in Washington, D.C. I also was chosen for several leadership conferences. I was on the dean's list and received the Dean of Students Award while in college. I graduated from Lawson State Community College with an associate degree in computer science.

Work life has been interesting and a great learning experience. I have worked at two corporations before AT&T. Teletch Holdings Inc. was job number one. My main job duty was to troubleshoot DSL (Internet Services) over the telephone. It was a great experience because I was able to understand the concept of computer-related issues. Another thing I learned was to communicate and interact

with other people face-to-face and over the phone. The great thing about this job is that no one treated me like I had a disability, but treated me as person. The second job was at Liberty National Life Insurance. Personally, I was skeptical about doing this job because it was commission only. I learned a lot about insurance in general, such as whole life and term insurances. The big difference between Liberty National and Teletch is I had to make appointments and go to people's homes to talk about insurance. It was a lot of traveling and a lot of paperwork. This was the type of job where you had to convince people why it is important to get covered. One of the great things about the job was the flexibility of it. It was definitely at your own pace. I work at AT&T now and I'm troubleshooting DSL (Internet Services) and really enjoy it. I learn something new everyday because technology changes everyday.

I want to share this: When looking for a job, make sure you attempt to find something that you will like. Sometimes we look for something because of the money instead of self-happiness. The job market is tough out there for everybody, but stay persistent, positive and have faith. If you're currently working and desire to be somewhere else, remain focused on that goal and keep trying until you get it. Sometimes you have to gain experience to get that dream job. Even though I'm working at AT&T, this is part of my plan to reach the big goal. I'm gaining experience and excelling at each level to get where I want to be. Don't give up and don't give in, just get up and go!

So, in conclusion, I'm doing great and living my life. I'm in the process of going back to school to pursue a bachelor's degree in computer science. I still love dancing, singing, playing drums, and acting CRAZY! You can reach me at [brinkleyf@yahoo.com](mailto:brinkleyf@yahoo.com), [www.myspace.com/brinkleyf](http://www.myspace.com/brinkleyf), on facebook, and [www.youtube.com/brinkleyf](http://www.youtube.com/brinkleyf) (no videos yet).

*Article re-printed from the YLF Advocate*





## Legislative visit

*State Rep. Mary Sue McClurkin, R-Pelham, visits the Homewood Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS) Augmentative Communication Technology (ACT) Clinic. While at the clinic, McClurkin met Alexander 'A.J.' Grimes along with CRS social worker Meagan Stewart.*

## Autumn Word Search

Q B R M C S Y Y Z M  
S E P T E M B E R R  
P M K V P F N L Y M  
N U A M N J M U Q H  
N E M R T H U F C A  
L L O P A M T R R R  
X C O Y K L U O N V  
L M M O X I A L Y E  
K F L K C X N O K S  
W O R C E R A C S T

AUTUMN  
COLORFUL  
COOL  
CORN  
HARVEST  
HAY  
LEAVES  
PUMPKIN  
SCARECROW  
SEPTEMBER



## CRS Parent Connection

Children's Rehabilitation Service  
Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services  
602 S. Lawrence St.  
P.O. Box 4280  
Montgomery, AL 36104-4280

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## What's Ahead

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|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Feb. 10, 2009</b>    | Statewide summit on improving health care access in Alabama; Birmingham Southern College; for more information, contact Alabama Arise at (334) 832-9060   |
| <b>March 2-4, 2009</b>  | Alabama Transition Conference; The Marriott at Grand National, Auburn-Opelika; for more information, call (334) 844-5927  |
| <b>March 13, 2009</b>   | Application deadline for Alabama Governor's Youth Leadership Forum; Troy University; for more information contact Becky Fields at (251) 479-8611  |
| <b>June 7-11, 2009</b>  | Alabama Governor's Youth Leadership Forum; Troy University; for more information, contact Becky Fields at (251) 479-8611  |
| <b>June 24-26, 2009</b> | Alabama Disability Mega Conference; sponsored by The Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities (ACDD) and Alabama Association for Persons in Supported Employment (AL-APSE); Montgomery Renaissance; for more information call, AL-APSE at (334) 353-7713 or ACDD at (334) 242-3973 |

Local PAC Meetings: Check your local CRS office for dates and times of meetings in your area.



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